



TOPIC

Trainers of Pastors International Coalition

INSIGHTS TO HELP YOU

Reflections and Encouragement
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JULY 2010

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15 "Best Practices" for Non-formal Pastoral Training Agencies

PAUL'S THOUGHTS



We trust that this month's 15 "Best Practices" article will challenge and encourage you in your ministry with and for the Lord. It is from an important summary document, written by Craig Parro. Brother Craig is President of

Background

Leadership Resources International (LRI) and MasterWorks Foundation hosted a 24-hour, invitation-only summit in November 2009 in Chicago on the subject,



"Best Practices" for Non-formal Pastoral Training Agencies. The overall goal was to help practitioners, through dialogue with informed and experienced peers, identify ways (best practices) to more effectively evaluate their training ministries as they seek to equip shepherds for the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Focus of the Conversation

Through a collaborative process, the summit participants agreed to focus the conversation on pastoral training evaluation-identifying the best assessment and improvement practices. (The focus of this roundtable was on developing pastoral leaders rather than the broader topic of leadership development.)

Craig is President of Leadership Resources Int'l, and a member of the TOPIC Board of Directors. Every blessing...paul

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. - Colossians 3:16 (NKJV)

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Questions and issues raised on the subject of evaluation and assessment included...

- What is a biblical basis for evaluation? How did Jesus evaluate?
- Integrating evaluation into the training methodology (vs. as an after-thought).
- Inculcating a continuous improvement mindset-"How are we doing? And, how can we get better?"
- Maintaining the quality of training, especially to the 2nd/3rd generation.
- Appropriate ways to measure different types of outcomes, such as...
 - Knowledge/theology/wisdom/worldview
 - Skills/competencies
 - Character/integrity/humility/"on-going brokenness"
 - Love/heart/passion/will
 - Spiritual formation/habits
- What can we rightfully "take credit" for? How certain are we that our training is (solely) responsible for the changes that we observe? (The problem of multiple explanatory variables.)
- Obtaining "real" numbers (vs. "evangelistically-speaking").
- Appropriate use of anecdotes.
- Cost/benefit-are donations being "leveraged?"
- How do donor goals mesh with agency goals? What role should donors play in establishing outcomes and measurement systems?

The day of dialogue was marked by attentive listening with lots of give and take, vulnerability and collegiality. Often, there were more questions than answers. Nevertheless, we were able to identify 15 "best practices" for pastor trainers and pastoral training organizations as we evaluate our training efforts.

Summary of the Findings

1. Evaluation as part of the organizational DNA

All agreed that evaluation and assessment were critical values that training organizations need to embrace.

"Best practice" pastoral training organizations will...

- Create and maintain a "culture of reflection," a community of self-reflecting leaders.
- Develop a "holy discontent" that results in a commitment to continuous improvement.
- Self-assess their ministry from start to finish, including strategy, design, process, and implementation.
- Weave evaluation throughout the teaching and training times, and not simply as a brief "add on" at the end.

2. Establishing clear goals and outcomes

All agreed that effective evaluation is dependent on establishing clear goals. However, differences emerged regarding the appropriate scope of the goals.

"Best practice" pastoral training organizations will...

- Clearly define their goals in terms of both *outputs* (i.e., near-term learning including skill development and utilization) and *outcomes* (long-term, broad transformations sought).
- Not be content to only evaluate *inputs* (i.e., what is taught,) but *outputs* (do they get it, can they do it?) and *outcomes* (how is the organization, church and community impacted?).
- Stay focused on evaluating long-term outcomes, recognizing that while long-term outcomes are more difficult to assess accurately, they are, in fact, the ultimate goal and justification for the training effort.

- Conduct longitudinal research where appropriate, obtaining multiple measurements along a timeline. When appropriate, begin with baseline/pre-measures.
- Keep the evaluation plan as simple as possible, taking into account data gathering challenges in the field.
- Evaluate with humility and honesty, keenly aware that God is using many other people, organizations, and situations to accomplish His work.

3. Maintaining relational integrity

Who determines what is to be learned? Who defines the teaching goals and corresponding changes sought—the teacher or the learner? Pastoral training organizations have a core set of competencies and a particular ministry calling. At the same time, learners have an understanding of their own training needs and desires.

"Best practice" pastoral training organizations will...

- Dialogue with indigenous learners and leaders with "appreciative inquiry" to align the learners' training needs with their own organizational training capacities and calling.
- Dialogue with indigenous learners and leaders about the value of evaluation in order to encourage a culture of reflection and build ownership for an appropriate evaluation plan.
- Design an evaluation plan that includes a learner self-assessment component and other appropriate tools such as "growth portfolios" which document on-going growth and demonstrated competencies.
- Invite indigenous learners and leaders to evaluate the pastor trainers and the relevancy and effectiveness of the training that they bring.
- Approach evaluation in a relationally healthy way, sensitive to both cross-cultural realities and relational implications.

Conclusions

While participants identified 15 evaluation and assessment best practices for pastoral trainers and pastoral training agencies, the group clearly recognized the need for more learning in this area and that non-western trainers and training organizations need to be invited into the conversation.

Other pastoral training arenas deserving a best practices forum might include:

- Best Program Design Practices (e.g. selection of trainees, scalability and replicability)
- Best Cross-cultural Partnership Practices (creating and maintaining ownership and alignment)
- Best Curriculum Practices
- Best Training Practices for Oral-learners
- Best Pedagogy Practices (training methodologies)
- Best Administrative Practices

A final area of exploration that generated much interest was the fostering of healthy synergies between the worlds of formal and non-formal training.

*Edited and Distributed by permission of the author, from his summary report: *The Best Evaluation and Assessment Practices for Non-formal Pastor-Trainers*, by Craig Parro, President of Leadership Resources International (LRI). TOPIC was privileged to be a participant in this summit. For more information, please contact: Cparro@LeadershipResources.org*

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